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ABSTRACT

The Test of Counselor Attitudes (Porter) was administered to five groups representing different levels of counselor training and experience. Significant differences were found between the groups on all five of the counselor attitudes meased: (1) evaluative; (2) interpretive; (3) understanding; (4) supportive; and (5) probing. As students receive more training, it was found that they demonstrate attitudes that are less evaluative, probing and supportive, and more understanding and interpretive. The results are discussed in terms of their congruence with approaches to counseling. Several cautions for interpreting the results are noted. (Author/TL)

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF COUNSELOR ATTITUDES TO TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF COUNSELOR ATTITUDES TO TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE

Despite the bewildering array of divergent counseling theories, virtually all suggest some common counselor attitudes which they suppose necessary for the counselor to be helpful. Truax and Carkhuff (1967) have documented many of these attitudes which seem to tie divergent theories together. A review of the literature (both philosophical and experimental) by Cash and Munger (1966) indicates that increasing emphasis continues to be placed on the personal characteristics of the counselor.

Research evidence has not always supported the contention that the characteristics of the counselor play an important role in counseling effectiveness. Polmantier (1966) for example, after reviewing seventy articles in the area of counselor selection, concluded that it was impossible to prescribe the personality of the counselor and further more questioned the need for such a prescription. The abundance of equivical findings (Allen, 1967; Cottle, 1953) suggests that predicting counselor effectiveness via counselor characteristics remains more a goal than a reality.

Simultaneously, the efficiency of traditional graduate school education of counselors and therapists has been called into question by a number of investigators (Carkhuff, 1966; Poser, 1966; Pierce, 1965). Patterson (1967) suggested a question which has not been answered to his satisfaction: "Does graduate education in counseling influence the personality and attitudes of students of counseling?" Generally speaking educational experiences have not been considered to have had much impact on attitude change (Rochester, 1967).

Given the "belief" that attitudes are significant in counselor effectiveness and the general opinion that attitudes are difficult to change, an appropriate question for counselor educators is what, if any, are the differences in counselor attitudes at varying levels of training and experience?

Porter (1949) developed an objective paper and pencil test called The Test of Counselor Attitudes that is designed to measure counselor attitudes on five dimensions: evaluative, interpretive, understanding, supportive, and probing. Each respondent is asked to choose his preferred response from five alternative counselor responses which represent the five dimensions of counselor attitudes for ten different situations. Hopke (1955) and Sternal (1967) have reported adequate reliability on the instrument for group comparisons. Hopke also reported moderate validity coefficients between the attitudes measured by the test and counselor's open ended responses to excerpts of client statements taken from counseling sessions. Sternal found moderate validity coefficients between the attitudes measured by the test and actual counselor interview behavior as assessed by trained judges.

Munger and Johnson (1960) found significant differences between pre and post testing of an eight week NDEA Counseling and Guidance Institute. They also reported significant differences between these institute members and a control group of local teachers. Munger, Myers, and Brown (1963) reported that these differences did not hold up over time (27 months) except for those institute members who were actually employed as counselors.

Demos and Zuwaylif (1963) found significant changes in all five of the dimensions measured by the test when it was given as both a pre and post training measure during a six-week NDEA Counseling and Guidance Institute.

Ligon and Ruchman (1969) used the Porter test in evaluating the effects of a core class in guidance on part time counseling students. Considering only the understanding scale, they found significant differences between pre and post testing and this difference was sustained over a two-year period. At the time of the two-year follow-up, however, only ten of the thirty-two original subjects had graduated. The others were still in the program.

Finally, a cross sectional study of counselor attitudes has been undertaken by Kassera and Sease (1970). Three experimental groups of students at various levels of training served as subjects. Students were from an introductory course, and advanced counseling course and from a counseling practicum. Though both personality and attitude tests were employed, Porter's test indicated the most significant differences between the groups. Evaluative, supportive, probing, and understanding preferences consistently differentiated the advanced counseling groups from the comparison group and from the beginning group. They also reported significant changes over the semester on two of the scales.

The purpose of this project was to examine more broadly the attitudes held by groups differentiated by the amount of counselor training and experience they had attained in order to determine if the differences pre-

viously reported are reliable. Furthermore, this study directs itself to the question: "Do practicing counselors hold different attitudes than neophytes and do counselors in preparation as they are defined by increased levels of training and experience move towards holding the same attitudes as practicing counselors?"

Method

The Test of Counselor Attitudes was administered to five groups representing different levels of training and experience. The first group (n=6) designated as staff, consisted of the full-time professional staff of the University Counseling Center. One member of this group was trained as a clinical psychologist, four were trained as counseling psychologists, and one was trained as a psychiatric social worker. All of the full-time staff members hold Ph.D.'s except the psychiatric social worker, and all had functioned as professional counselors for four or more years. The second group (n=7) were all doctoral candidates serving an internship at the University Counseling Center. The third group (n=12) consisted of the practicum students at the Counseling Center who were in the process of completing a master's degree in counseling. The fourth and fifth groups (n's = 41 and 51 respectively) consisted of students pursuing master's degrees in counseling. The students in group four were enrolled in an advanced counseling course and the students in group five were enrolled in an introductory counseling course. Each of the subjects completed The

Test of Counselor Attitudes at the beginning of a quarter before increased training and experience were attained.

Hopke (1955) reported that the reliability of the Porter instrument was increased if a rank order scoring method is utilized rather than the single point scoring method of the author. Consequently the rank order scoring method was utilized in this project. Each subject was asked to rank order the five alternative counselor responses according to his preference of responding for each of the ten situations. An average rank order score on each of the scales was obtained for each group with possible scores ranging from one to five. Low numbers represent a preference for the attitude represented by the scale and high numbers represent a rejection of the attitude represented by the scale.

Single classification analysis of variance for unequal cells (Winter, 1962) was utilized in testing five null-hypotheses. These hypotheses sought to answer the question as to whether there were differences between the groups as to their preference for evaluative, interpretive, understanding, supportive, and probing responses. A second question concerned itself with trends the differences might represent if they existed.

Results

Significant differences were found between the groups on all five of the counselor attitude scales. Table 1-5 present the analyses of the five attitude scales by groups representing differing levels of training and experience.

TABLE 1

Analysis of Variance of Preference
for Evaluating Responses

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F Ratio
Levels of Training and Experience	2,664	4	666.00	27.00*
Error	2,788	113	24.67	
Total	5,452	117		

*Significant at or beyond the .05 level.

TABLE 2

Analysis of Variance of Preference
for Interpretive Responses

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F Ratio
Levels of Training and Experience	1,562	4	390.50	18.71*
Error	2,359	113	20.87	
Total	3,921	117		

*Significant at or beyond the .05 level.

TABLE 3

Analysis of Variance of Preference
for Understanding Responses

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F Ratio
Levels of Training and Experience	2,499	4	624.75	20.68*
Error	3,414	113	30.21	
Total	5,913	117		

*Significant at or beyond the .05 level.

TABLE 4

Analysis of Variance of Preference
for Supportive Responses

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F Ratio
Levels of Training and Experience	491	4	122.75	3.99*
Error	3,476	113	30.76	
Total	3,967	117		

*Significant at or beyond the .05 level.

TABLE 5

Analysis of Variance of Preference
for Probing Responses

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F Ratio
Levels of Training and Experience	254	4	63.50	3.23*
Error	2,220	113	19.64	
Total	2,474	117		

*Significant at or beyond the .05 level.

Added meaning can be gained by examining the mean scores of the groups on each of the five scales. Consistent trends are visible on some of the scales. (See Table 6).

TABLE 6

Mean Scores by Groups Representing
Differential Levels of Training and Experience
on the Attitude Scales*

Group	n	Evaluative	Interpretive	Understanding	Supportive	Probing
Staff	6	4.13	2.75	1.83	3.23	3.08
Interns	7	4.11	3.00	1.93	3.30	2.66
Practicum	12	4.04	2.64	1.97	3.48	2.80
Advanced Counseling	41	3.17	3.14	2.30	3.14	2.78
Introduction to Counseling	51	2.88	3.67	3.04	2.87	2.54

*Based on a scale from 1 to 5. Low numbers represent a preference for the type or response. High numbers represent a rejection of the type of response.

Mean scores on the evaluative scale suggests a movement away from evaluatory responses as training and experience increases. Similar trends are apparent on the supportive and probing scales. As the groups represent increased training and experience there is a trend toward preferring understanding and interpretive responses. Two inconsistencies in the trends can be noted. Practicum students indicated a preference for interpretive responses that was greater than either the staff or the interns. Interns indicated a preference for probing responses that was greater than any of the groups other than the Introduction to Counseling Group.

In general the results of this study support the contention that professional counselors do hold different attitudes than counselors who are beginning their professional training--at least in terms of the five dimensions measured by Porter's Test of Counselor Attitudes. Also as attitudes were assessed at the various levels of training and experience, there does seem to be a fairly consistent movement on the part of counselor in preparation to display attitudes similar to those held by the professional counselors.

Discussion

If the goal of the counseling interview is to stimulate interaction in order to obtain information concerning the counselee the attitudes held by counselors would seem to be a significant variable. The counselors with less training and experience showed a preference for response patterns of probing, supporting, and evaluating. It seems doubtful that this kind of counselor behavior is a useful way to facilitate interaction. It is like

saying, "Tell me about yourself and your situation so I can evaluate, condone, or possibly condemn it." The experienced counselor in the study preferred to communicate to the counselee that they understood what he had expressed and to add some interpretative flavor. These kinds of attitudes would seem to lesson defensiveness and to encourage increased counselee expression. It is interesting to note that the experienced counselors in the study represent divergent theoretical positions (e.g., Behavioral, Psychoanalytic, Client-centered, etc.). In this regard these findings support the position that counselors of different orientations share common attitudes as they initially approach interaction with clients. From the view point of therapeutic value a preference for the communication of understanding would be viewed as positive regardless of the counselor's theoretical orientation. If, for example, the counselor sees his role as "interventionistic", a preference for communicating understanding would facilitate the choice of an appropriate intervention. If the counselor views his role as "facilitative", then a preference for understanding responses would be viewed as freeing, facilitating, and consistent with desirable outcome as viewed from a client-centered point of view.

Some caution is suggested in the interpretation of meaning and the generalizability of the results of this study. First of all the ipsative nature of the forced choice response patterns required by the scoring procedure raises some question as to the meaning when these ipsative response

patterns are averaged. Certainly the degree or intensity of preference is lost. Even so, rank order preferences do give some indication of direction. Secondly, the analyses performed to not provide data as to where actual differences between the groups exist. For example,the mean scores of the groups on the Evaluative Scale suggest the difference is between subject in the Introductory Counseling course and the Practicum group, but Interns and Staff are no different than Practicum students. It would be useful to counselor educators to know how much training and experience might be required to bring about differences on a given dimension. A third caution needs to be mentioned relative to this last point. This study was conducted cross-sectionally, not longitudinally. Therefore, it is not safe to assume training and experience have anything to do with the differences reported. It may be,for example,that only those students that hold attitudes similar to the professional counselors stay in the training program and enter job settings as professional counselors. Nevertheless, this study indicates as students approach upper levels of training and experience they hold attitudes which are believed to be conducive to therapeutic aims.

SUMMARY

The relationship of counselor attitudes to training and experience was investigated. The test of counselor attitudes was administered to five groups representing different levels of counselor training and experience. Significant differences were found between the groups on all five of the counselor attitudes measured.

As students receive more training and experience,they demonstrate attitudes that are less evaluative, probing and supportive and more understanding and interpretive. The results were discussed in terms of their congruence with approaches to counseling. Several cautions for interpreting the results were noted.

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